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FIRST BRNO MACHINE SHOPS, "KLEMENT GOTTFELD" PLANT

[Comment: The following is the full text of Radio Free Europe Item 4086/56, dated 20 April 1956. The source of the information is described as a 17-year-old molder who arrived in Austria in November 1955. The date of observation was November 1955. The RFE comment indicates that none of the names included in this report have been reported previously to them.]

The First Brno Machine Shops, "Klement Gottwald" Plant, is located on Olomoucka ulice in Brno, Czechoslovakia, and produces metal castings of various sizes and finished [machine] parts. Including administrative personnel, some 6,000 persons are employed at the enterprise, with men comprising some 70 percent of the labor force.

Location and Description of the Plant

The entrance to the plant is a large iron gate on Olomoucka ulice. It is guarded by uniformed members of the Plant Guard (Zavodni straz) armed with revolvers. Each employee entering the gate must present his plant identification card or a [special] control pass.

A special provision of the plant is the inspection of each employee at his departure. Normally the guard superficially inspects each individual's pockets and handbag. An extraordinary feature is a red light placed above the exit, and controlled by a member of the Plant Guard who is stationed in an office and has a good view of departing workers. Whenever the guard turns on the light, the three persons preparing to leave the gate at that instant are led to the guard office and subjected to a close personal inspection. Male guards inspect the men and female guards inspect the women.

The inspections are conducted because the employees steal supplies from the plant. During working hours they conceal the finished products and smuggle them out of the plant. At home they construct washing machines and sell them, to supplement their meager earnings.

Administrative buildings are located on both sides of the plant entrance. The plant itself is composed of several small and large workshops including fitting shops, mold-drying sheds, warehouse for foundry materials, locker rooms, foundry -- medium molding shop, apprentice's foundry, foundry -- large molding shop, foundry -- core shop, sand dressing shop, foundry -- small molding shop, welding shop, sandblast (tryskarna), nonferrous metals foundry, sand warehouse, workshop for breaking castings, machine shop, pattern warehouse, plant kitchen and dining hall, pipe shop (potrubarna), and the dispensary. The three work shifts are as follows: 0600 to 1400 hours, 1400 to 2200 hours, and 2200 to 0600 hours. Only two shifts are fully manned. The third, the night shift, operates only in the foundry.

Plant Management

The director of the plant is a fanatic Bolshevik named Zak (fnu), who is about 45 years old, short and stout, and has auburn hair which he parts. He appears in the workshops among the workers only when visitors are present. He has an air of superiority about him, and is not popular. Only the turbine operators, who are also fanatic Communists, and whose wages he illegally increases at the expense of other workers, are fond of him.

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The [party] cadre lecturer is Rauzgold (fnu), who is about 43 years old, is rather tall and stout, has straight hair, has a mole on the left side of his face, and his mouth twists whenever he speaks. He is a trained founder and spends his days walking through the workshops. The source describes him as a mild Communist, who cares little whether he is called "Mister" or "Comrade." The plant director, on the other hand, demanded that he be addressed as "Comrade."

Known Foremen

Alois Novak, foreman of the machine shop, is 37 years old, an active but temperate Communist. He treats the workers well and is popular.

Jaroslav Chorvat, foreman of the wood pattern shop, is a fanatic and condescending Bolshevik. He forces the workers to join the KSC, (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), denying proper wages to those who refuse, assigning them to less desirable tasks, and making life difficult for them. He is 42 years old, has straight hair, and is tall and slender.

Novotny (fnu), foreman of the nonferrous metals foundry, is rather slight in build and is 28 years old. He is a member of the KSC, but is not active, and is popular with the workers.

Jan Palecek, foreman of the small molding shop, is a fanatic and dangerous Communist. He is 48 years old, and unlike others of his type, he is a true skilled specialist. He exploits his position, forcing his subordinates to join the KSC and other Communist organizations such as the CSM [Ceskoslovensky svaz mladeze, Czechoslovak Federation of Youth], the CSPS, and others. Those who do not oblige are assigned tasks at which they can earn little or are otherwise discriminated against.

Jan Svoboda, foreman of the large molding shop, is a fanatic and dangerous Communist. He is 43 years old, and directs the production of turbines. He is a good friend of Zak, the enterprise director. He favors the Communists, and like Palecek, insists that all workers join the KSC and participate in [socialist] competition from which he realizes the greatest benefits.

The Medium Molding Shop

The medium molding shop is a separate workshop bordered on the right by the apprentice's foundry building, and on the left by the large molding shop. The building has a glass roof and an earthen floor. It is equipped with both stationary and mobile cranes. There are 18 jib cranes, with nine being on each side of the building, and four mobile cranes. There are also pneumatic molding machines. A concrete passageway with tracks for carts bringing in materials or whatever happens to be needed, runs through the center of the building.

This shop produces castings for turbine generators, dynamo stators, and other machine parts weighing up to about 1,000 kilograms.

The medium molding shop has a labor force of about 250 workers, with 90 percent of these being men. The workers are assigned to three worksites (strediska) [within the shop]. Women work only on the morning and afternoon shifts. They serve as helpers, hauling needed materials such as sand and molding clay, painting the cores with graphite, mixing graphite and copper, and performing other such jobs.

Only the morning and afternoon shifts are fully manned, and only the casting crews operate at night.

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Stanislav Vlcek, chief of operations at the medium molding shop, is 45 years old. He is slender and of medium height. A fanatic Bolshevik cooperating with the State Security Police, he directs the foremen to force workers to become shock workers, and requires that his subordinates join the KSC. He organizes lectures and discussion groups at which suggestions for improvements of operations are considered. Up to August 1955, these meetings were held during working hours, but virtually no one attended them. Since that time the meetings have been made a part of the political training of the ROH [Revolucni odborove hnutí, Revolutionary Trade Union Movement] and are held once a week during working hours, usually between 1600 and 1730 hours.

Vlcek is generally disliked. He deals incorrectly with the workers, spies on them, and penalizes them for even the least infraction of the rules, such as late arrival. He spends most of the day in his office smoking and debating with the foremen.

Group Foremen

Dusan Berg, aged 32, has wavy auburn hair which is quite thin and which he combs to the rear. He is rather tall and lean. Berg is not a Communist, and is a skilled specialist. He is always willing to help, at least by suggestion, and is popular with the workers. (According to a letter which source received from his sister in Czechoslovakia, Berg has been released by the factory.)

Frantisek Sedlak, aged 26, lives in Ochoz near Brno, is tall, has dark wavy hair which he combs to the rear, and speaks with a lisp. He is a bootlicker and a fanatic Communist, who pressures the workers, carefully observes their arrival at the plant, records each instance of tardiness, and docks their leave at a rate of 2 days of leave per 8 hours of unexcused absence. He is unpopular.

Josef Hauser, aged 26, is rather short and stout. He came to the factory from the "Karlovo Pole" Engineering Works in 1955, replacing foreman Frantisek Polacek, a fanatic Communist and a brute who beat up new employees and was removed from his position for this reason. Hauser appears to be a mild Communist.

Other foundry employees include:

Karel Borovicka, aged 17, member of the CSM

Mila Bednarik, aged 19, a Communist and CSM member

Vaclav Kolegar, over 20 years of age, CSM member

Bohuslav Vesely, aged 20, CSM member and a fanatic Communist who lives in Hrusovany nad Jevisovkou

Jaroslav Moudry, aged 17, CSM member

Frantisek Handl, aged 16, CSM member

Frantisek Hanak, aged 18, CSM member living in Sidvirice

Josef Pospisil, aged 25, CSM member, fanatic Bolshevik

Josef Lajzar, aged 17, CSM member

Pavel Hrycirov, aged 23, CSM member, fanatic Bolshevik

Stanislav Chatrny, about 20 years of age, CSM member

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Emil Hell, aged 18, CSM member and a Communist

Josef Busov, aged 19, CSM member and a Communist

Wages

All wages are computed on a piecework basis and monthly net earnings are as follows: young, single, childless workers, 1,400 to 1,600 crowns; married workers with children, 1,800 to 2,000 crowns; foremen, 2,400 crowns; and women, 800 to 1,000 crowns.

The workday is 8 hours long.

Difficulties of Production

Production at the factory suffers from shortages of iron ore, steel, manganese, gray cast iron, and the critical shortage of nonferrous metals, including bronze, brass, copper, aluminum, and others.

All casting heads and pouring gates must be knocked off and returned to the blast furnaces. Thus the metal may be placed into the furnaces as many as ten times, but the work goes on. After all, one cannot cast water.

The rate of rejects is great, averaging around 15 or 20 percent [of total production]. The high reject rate and the poor quality of products are caused by the shortage and poor quality of raw materials and by the poorly organized careless work, and shock work.

The castings have a great deal of air bubbles caused by high gas content, and particularly by steam. This steam is a result of pouring the metal into moist molds.

The source stated that the reason for casting the metal in moist molds is the shortage of metal. The prepared molds must stand for as long as several days while the plant awaits a supply of metal and during this time they accumulate moisture.

Another very serious defect of the castings are the so-called "modules," which break blades [on metalworking tools] to splinters. These are caused by the low grade of sand which is old and poorly cleaned, and which cannot withstand the prescribed heat level, fusing with the metal. There is a shortage of sand.

The castings are not uniform because the founders perform piecework and are interested only in quantity. On occasion a worker trips over a mold, but proceeds to pour the metal into it despite its damaged condition. This is "shock work." The helpers do not prepare the mold properly, and since they also perform piecework, they leave it as is just as long as it does not collapse. But the main reason for this lack of uniformity in castings is that the metal is not hot enough and fails to reach all parts of the mold. The metal is not hot enough because it remains in ladles until a crane becomes available, since the work is not organized well enough to keep operations moving at a steady pace. Production is also adversely affected by the high breakdown rate on the cranes, and by the shortage of necessary frames.

Worker Morale

Various types of people work in the plant's molding shops. Some are true Communists performing as if they were working on their own property, and earning more than the other workers. In most cases they do not deserve the higher earnings since they are assigned to special tasks at which they can earn more.

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A majority of the workers are dissatisfied. They are not Communists and work because they must. The foundry had a particularly large number of workers who were forced to work and had no other choice. The young foundry workers did not come to this job voluntarily despite the fact that they were CSM members. They would have preferred to operate a lathe or work in the fitting shop. They had to work, and finally became accustomed to this job.

The majority of workers in the other shops of the plant are also dissatisfied. Most of these workers earn much less than the foundry workers, and find it necessary to smuggle out materials in order to make money on the side.

After training, a lathe operator such as the source can net from 600 to 800 crowns monthly. Experienced lathe operators net a maximum of 1,000 to 1,200 crowns monthly.

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